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FLORA
MACLEAN'S REWARD

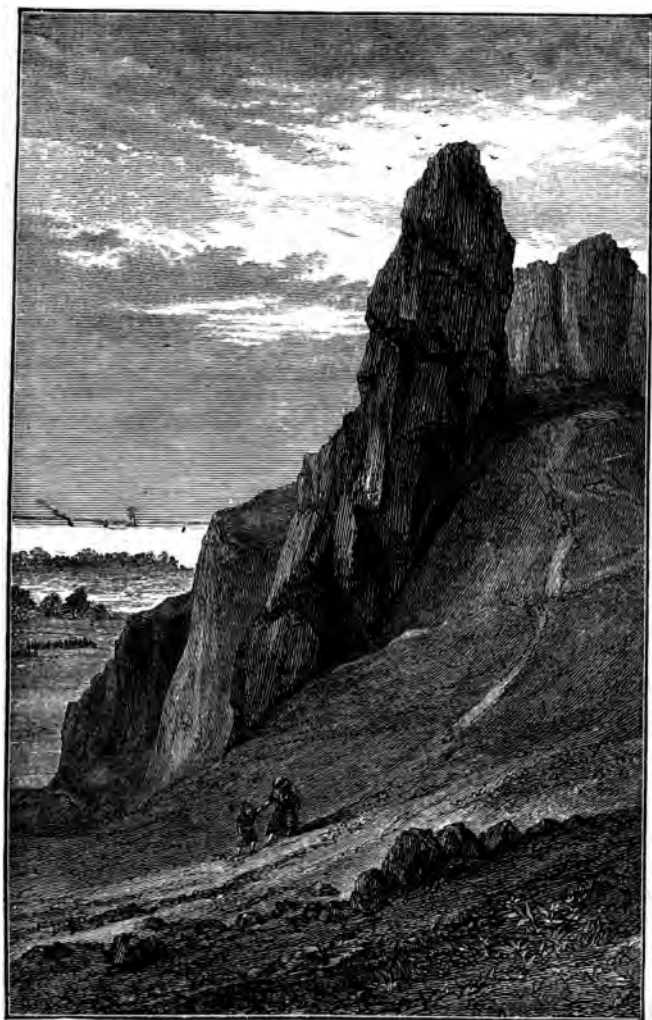




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FLORA MACLEAN'S REWARD.

A Tale of the Hebrides.

BY

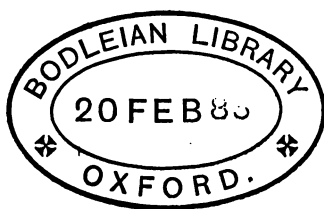
JANE M. KIPPEN,

AUTHOR OF 'AUNT MARGARET'S VISIT,' 'EDITH OSWALD,' ETC. ETC.



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FLORA MACLEAN'S REWARD.

CHAPTER I.

FLORA GOES TO SERVICE.

IT was a day of universal sorrow and regret in Flora Cameron's native island, when she left it to seek service in the distant city of Glasgow. And no wonder that such should be the general feeling at parting with one as universally beloved as she was universally known.

With old and young,—we need not add with rich and poor, for the inhabitants of that district are much on a level as regards that distinction,—the kind-hearted girl was a general favourite, from the reverend sire and 'granny'

down to the little child, for all of whom she had the ready smile, the kind word, and the helping hand. Though neither beautiful in person nor captivating in manner, in a conventional sense, she possessed qualities of mind and character far excelling mere outward attractions. The beauties of a warm, loving heart, and an honest, kindly nature, were pre-eminently Flora's.

A dutiful, affectionate daughter and sister; active, useful, and industrious in the home circle; ever willing to help and comfort alike the old and young, or to redress the wrongs of the timid and oppressed; as strong and energetic as she was obliging; distinguished by good sense, high principle, and a humble reverence for the sacred and the true, there was nothing wanting in her to gain the regard of neighbours and friends in that primitive community. And now that she was about to leave them, all felt how great a blank she would make. How she should be missed by the good-wives, whose dwellings she had often helped to tidy up when her own home duties were over; by the aged men whose sight was waxing dim, to whom she had been in the habit of reading the word of God in her clear melodious voice, and in the 'tongue' that every Gael loves so well! And

the young people in whose pleasures and sports she had ever willingly shared; the little ones she had so often carried about in her arms, or tenderly nursed when their mothers were employed in out-door work, or away with dinner to their husbands labouring in distant fields; and many others to whom she had rendered like kindly offices,—what would they do when the genial influence of Flora's presence should be withdrawn?

But all must make up their minds to the inevitable, as Flora had made up hers to do as most of her young country-women were wont when they attained the age at which it was considered right that they should gain their own livelihood. And it was only natural that a strong active girl like Flora should wish to be up and about with others in this most laudable ambition. The very thought of contributing to the comfort of her parents in their approaching old age was sufficient incentive to such exertion, had such been necessary. Hard-working, patient, and frugal, not without an unusual amount of energy and self-denial, had they toiled and struggled on in a region whose natural resources are few and scant, to make 'ends meet,' and to bring up their three sons

and two daughters respectably. And now that John, or Ian as he was familiarly called in the native tongue, had got on to be a journeyman worker along with his father at the slate-quarry, all was sure to go well with them, so much would depend on this eldest son, as good and exemplary in his own way as Flora was in hers. Then, as Donald had gone to sea, and Hamish to work with a farmer in a neighbouring island, there would be the less household duty for Morag, the youngest girl at home; so it behoved Flora to do for herself, and help to requite the good parents who had done so much for her. As no reasonable objection could be offered to this step towards independence, the stores of the mother's industry for many past winters in the product of her spinning-wheel were brought forth to furnish a suitable outfit for Flora, which she made up for herself. And now, all preparations completed, she stood, one bright sunny April morning, on the little jetty or pier from which the ferry-boat takes out passengers to the steamer, attended by the members of her own family, and half the population of the village who had turned out to see her depart. A few moments of anxious, nervous watching, and then, as the large steamer

looms in sight, the pilot in his blue jerkin and Glengarry bonnet pulls his boat to shore. Ian, who is to take the second oar and see his sister safe on board, helps to lift down her box. Many a blessing is uttered, many a kind wish expressed, many a warm pressure of hands exchanged, as Flora takes, through blinding tears that she vainly tried to restrain, a last farewell of loved and loving friends. Many a longing, eager gaze follows the little boat as it is rowed out to the larger vessel. And as eagerly do those friendly eyes continue to watch her as she stands on the deck in her hodden grey gown and Campbell tartan plaid, waving her adieus, which are as promptly answered from the shore, till the steamer diminishes in the distance, and the parting signal is seen no more.

It had taken all the courage and resolution, of which the brave girl possessed no ordinary share, to enable her to control her feelings throughout this parting scene. And now, the trying moment past, a natural sense of desolation completely overcomes her, and seating herself on the gunwale of the vessel, her tears drop fast and thick into the deep blue waters that lap and gurgle underneath.

And soon, as she continues to watch the white foamy track of the steamer through that waste of waters, the group of islands—her native one, of course, standing out most conspicuously to her gaze—show like so many specks on the distant ocean line, till they gradually fade from her sight. Then many anxious thoughts, till now repressed, begin to crowd into her mind.

It could not well be otherwise, when she had leisure to reflect on her position as a girl of little more than sixteen, who had never been further from home than on a visit to one or two of the neighbouring islands, setting out alone for the first time to a distant and unknown part of the country.

To Flora that one idea was sufficiently formidable. And if she had been better acquainted with the vast extent of the city for which she was bound, and to which, wholly unprotected and almost a stranger, she was about to commit herself as a candidate for employment, she might have felt somewhat like a lonely voyager, embarked on such a sea as she now traversed, without chart, compass, or pilot to guide his course.

But happily for our young traveller, she was

in a great measure ignorant of the difficulties and drawbacks which she might have to encounter. Her spirit, moreover, was buoyant, and her faith was strong. A companion from her native island who went to Glasgow some months previous, and whose success in obtaining employment had been a strong incentive to Flora to follow, had got into a capital situation; and why should she not be equally fortunate? Besides, independent of her, she should not be altogether without friends in that strange big place. Her mother had two cousins settled there, a respectable tradesman in a thriving business, with a maiden sister who kept house for him. And though she had never seen those relatives, who had held no correspondence with her mother since they left the Hebrides, nearly thirty years previous, with the happy confidence of youth, especially belonging to her station of life, Flora felt certain that they would befriend her and do what they could to further her interests. She had managed through the above-mentioned companion's agency to obtain their address, and she would call on her arrival. She was sure they would receive her kindly, as folks like them were far more ready to show hospitality than to write letters. So she dried

her tears, and rallied her spirits ; and soon some of her fellow-passengers, seeing that she was alone, began to take kindly notice of her, which further helped to cheer her. The voyage, too, proved favourable beyond her utmost expectations. Only a slight breeze ruffled the surface of the ocean ; and even in the dreaded Mull of Cantyre, which she had heard described as if it had been a Scottish Bay of Biscay, she encountered nothing approaching to a storm. So, not being at all sick, she got on very comfortably, especially as the steward, thinking she would not like the steerage cabin, allowed her to sit in the passage between the engine and state rooms during the night.

By early dawn she passed the serrated peaks of Arran, and the Firth of Clyde burst upon her view in all its matchless beauty, its waters sparkling under a glorious sunrise. How delightful to our young traveller was the sail up this splendid estuary, with its various lochs on one side running up between grand mountains, their rugged forms just emerging from the morning mists ; on the other, smiling villages, and country mansions half-hid among woods fresh with the tender verdure of spring ; and its bosom dotted over with vessels of



AILSA CRAIG.

various kinds! After passing more than one busy seaport with its shipping in the docks, as the stream gradually narrowed, its fertile banks with their background of wooded plains and green hills were exchanged for long ranges of building-yards, resounding with the clang of hammer and noise of machinery; and as the blue sky becomes darkened by the smoke from innumerable tall chimney-stalks rising amidst a countless multitude of houses piled up behind a forest of masts in the harbours, Flora knows instinctively that the great mart of commerce, the scene of her present hopes and expectations, is close at hand.

Her friend, Katie MacDonald, meets her on the wharf, and after a warm welcome, hurries her off through noisy crowded streets to the house of her mother's cousin. Here also she is most kindly received by a pleasant motherly-looking woman and her brother, who has just come in to breakfast, of which both hospitably invite Flora to partake. The meal despatched, after many questions asked and answered about old friends in the Hebrides, Katie proposes that Flora should immediately accompany her to make some calls where she might possibly be put in the way of hearing of a situation. In

reply to the suggestion of the good woman of the house, that after her long voyage her young cousin would be the better for a little rest, the former, remarking that a strong Highland girl never knew what it was to feel weary, and that being in search of a place she must look sharp, as good ones were apt to be picked up at once in a large city like Glasgow. And adding that she herself had no time to spare, as she had only been allowed an hour or two to remain out by her mistress, she hurried the candidate for preferment off on her important search..

But notwithstanding the exertions of her zealous friend, aided occasionally by her cousin, Grace Fraser, who accompanied the pair as often as she could be spared from home duties, fully a week elapsed before success crowned their efforts. Katie was always so limited for time when she did get leave of absence, that she never hesitated about walking her friend 'off her feet' through the interminable rows of streets; so that, notwithstanding the assertion of its being a thing impossible, poor Flora soon knew weariness in good earnest; till at length, when half-bewildered with the noise and bustle of all

around her in her daily wanderings, a situation was found. By no means what Flora would have chosen, however, if she could have done better, being that of nurse and general 'help' in a family consisting of father, mother, and six young children, where only one other servant was kept. But finding that there was no room to pick and choose, she was obliged meanwhile to be content. So, after writing home to tell her parents that she had got employment, she entered upon her arduous duties with a firm determination to discharge them to the best of her ability. This, however, was no easy matter. To submit to the daily worry entailed by her charge of six unruly children, and a fretful, exacting mother, while burdened with the heavy task of constant household drudgery besides, taxed both temper and patience. Then the close air of the crowded noisy street, almost in the heart of the city,—what a change from the fresh bracing sea-breezes, and grand wild scenery of her native island! what a contrast between that family circle, and the sweet social amenities of the only other home she had ever known! And had it not been that Flora had early learned to carry all her troubles—light hitherto as compared with those

she had now to encounter—to Him who could alone help her, she felt as if her spirit would have sunk altogether under the difficulties of her new position. But possessing, happily for herself, a cheerful dauntless nature, she continued to bear up bravely ; consoling herself by thinking that the drawbacks of her present situation might, after all, prove the best training she could have in her first outset in life, and with the hope of being more fortunate next time.

And as we shall presently see, the faith and patience of our good Highland girl were in due time rewarded.





CHAPTER II.

PREFERMENT.

JUST as Flora's first gloomy winter spent in Glasgow was merging into the more hopeful season of spring, a happy change occurred for her. A young woman, daughter of an intimate friend of Grace Fraser's, being about to leave a situation in which she had served for some years, it occurred to the former that Flora might apply for it. The girl was, to be sure, young enough to succeed a thorough experienced servant such as she knew Mary Brown to be. But then, she had always heard Mary's mother speak of it as such a first-rate place, the mistresses such good, kind, considerate ladies, and belonging to such 'a genteel old family,'—and Grace, like most Highlanders, set great

store by the last-named advantage, especially when, as in the present case, united with so many others. So, on Mrs. Brown telling her that she might be able to secure it for her young cousin, as the ladies had asked her Mary if she could recommend a successor, Grace immediately begged her to 'put in a good word' for Flora, to which her friend readily agreed. No doubt there might be some objection on the score of Flora's youth, she said, in case of encouraging too sanguine hopes; adding, however, that now she thought of it, her daughter was not much older when she first went to Miss Hamilton's; and that lady was most willing to teach a girl who would be smart and ready to learn, as no doubt her cousin was. And the matter was clinched by a promise to write to her daughter that very day on Flora's behalf. As soon as it could possibly be received, Miss Hamilton's residence being at a watering-place on the Firth of Clyde, there was an answer from Mary—very encouraging to the hopes of our young aspirant for preferment—with a request from her mistress to see the girl, as soon as she could come.

Delighted with the hope of success thus held

out, though the good woman seldom stirred from home, at once to show her interest in her young friend and her respect for the mistress she so wished to secure for her, Grace determined to accompany the former on her visit of application. So, early the following day, having donned her 'Sunday's best,' consisting of a blue-black silk dress, a Paisley plaid, and velvet bonnet,—a combination of attire which had served as 'a decency' to her almost since the time she had come to Glasgow,—and having previously admonished Flora to 'make herself as neat and respectable as she could,' the pair set out on their journey together. This time they travelled partly by railway, the novelty of which mode of transit delighted Flora, and doubtless helped to augment the hopeful feelings which, with the natural buoyancy of youth, she made no effort to repress.

Their destination, which they afterwards reached by crossing the firth in a steamer, was a beautiful village, with rows of villas peeping out from surrounding foliage, stretching along the successive bays of a finely indented coast, a range of wooded hills rising behind, with glimpses of grand rugged mountains in the distance. The Misses Hamilton occupied an

old-fashioned whitewashed house standing near the shore, a pretty lawn, shrubbery, and flower-borders in front, and a high-walled garden, well sheltered by tall trees, behind ; the abode within and without presenting a picture of quiet domestic peace and comfort.

Flora and her cousin were kindly received by both ladies : the elder, tall, handsome, somewhat dignified in look and manner ; the younger, sweet, gentle, and engaging in both respects, and, as the girl at once concluded, altogether more approachable.

The latter, indeed, found it rather a trying ordeal, even when backed by the encouragement afforded in the portly presence of her honest relative, to be subjected to numerous questions from the stately elder sister regarding qualifications and capabilities. She was anxious, the lady began by saying, to secure a steady, unsophisticated country girl to fill the place in her household. Never having heard the second adjective made use of before, poor Flora could not help feeling much puzzled regarding its meaning, doubting from its imposing sound, especially as uttered by such a lady, that it must signify some quality to which it would be presumptuous in her even to pretend. But the

kind-looking Miss Johanna at once came to her relief by explaining that her sister meant a simple, willing girl, not above being taught, while obedient and anxious to please. Of course Flora readily promised to try to do her best, expressing with becoming modesty her desire to learn anything she didn't know; and her worthy cousin confidently endorsing her possession of the properties Miss Hamilton had indicated, the questions of work and wages were soon settled to the entire satisfaction of all parties. And the cousins returned to Glasgow equally happy, the elder in having been the chief agent in securing, the latter considering herself truly fortunate in obtaining, a situation that promised so well.

When Flora entered upon her new duties, she soon found that promise fulfilled, even beyond her most sanguine expectations. If at first Miss Hamilton's rules might seem a little over-strict, she was at the same time always just and reasonable, willing to make allowance for Flora's inexperience, and to acknowledge her obedience and desire to please. And while she grudged no pains in initiating the girl into every department of household work and domestic economy, Miss Johanna gave her

many kindly counsels and precious instructions regarding matters of far higher and more enduring import, lessons which often came back with soothing power and sweet consoling influence to Flora in after life. And so well did Flora succeed in studying the wishes, while attentive to the instructions of both, that mutual satisfaction was soon established between mistress and maid. Both ladies, indeed, were so considerate for the comfort and well-being of their domestic, that to serve them became a real pleasure. Flora enjoyed as much liberty as she could reasonably desire, being permitted of evenings when her work was over, often to take a walk, pay a visit, or have a friend to visit her. And, greatest boon of all, occasionally in the summer season, when the ladies went to spend some time with a married sister in England, she got home to see her parents, to whom her presence always seemed to bring new light and gladness as often as they met. Thus was Flora so very happy in this pleasant service, that as year followed year till ten had passed away,—like Goldsmith's 'Country Clergyman,' 'she ne'er had changed, nor wished to change her place.'

But a change was approaching nevertheless ;

one, too, involving new duties, new responsibilities, new, or rather hitherto unknown trials as well. Five years previous to the period to which we have brought our story, Flora had renewed her acquaintance with a young man she had known long ago, a native, indeed, of her 'own place.' He had come to Glasgow some years before Flora did, to learn his trade as a mason. But not till some time after he had served his apprenticeship did they meet, in consequence of his employer having undertaken a building contract in the very village in which Flora was residing as servant with the Misses Hamilton. Happening to encounter each other in the house of a mutual acquaintance, also a native of their distant island, a mutual recognition took place, which after many subsequent meetings ended in something approaching to attachment between the pair. But when Allan MacLean first asked Flora to be his wife, she was not inclined to listen to his suit. She was so very happy where she was, she could not make up her mind to leave her situation, at least for the present. So he left again for Glasgow. But as fate, or rather Providence would have it, a new contract brought him back again; and by and by his

persevering attachment began somewhat to alter Flora's mood. In fact, inclination pulling her in two opposite directions at once, a struggle ensued in her mind which for some time left her totally at a loss how to decide. On the one hand, there was the perfect comfort and happiness of her present home, her deep regard for her worthy and kind ladies, which rendered the bare thought of severing the connection between them something almost too painful to contemplate. Then, on the other, arose that of her equally strong regard for one who had proved himself so faithful to her. The idea, too, of possessing a home of her own—an irresistible attraction to persons of her class, especially when they have been some time at service, followed up by that of securing a provision for her old age—often a fallacy at the best, considering the many contingencies which may render that prospect null and void—seemed equally inviting. But in fact, strange as it may seem that such a consideration should go for much with one so sensible as Flora, the chief item that perhaps unconsciously to herself struck the balance in favour of her yielding her consent to her lover's wishes—Allan was so pleasant in his ways, and so handsome,

one could hardly see a finer-looking fellow! And in truth, in her secret heart Flora felt not a little flattered on this account by his preference; for, with all her good qualities, poor Flora was after all very human, and a true type of her sex in her admiration for good looks!

‘She wasna,’ she thought, ‘much to look at herself;’ and she wondered that one so ‘braw,’ as she expressed it, should have made choice of her, when ‘many a much bonnier lass would hae been proud to be his wife.’

So the struggle in Flora’s mind ended, as such kind of uncertainty usually does, in a determination to marry Allan; right principle and good character, as she had never seen cause to doubt either, being in a great measure taken for granted. And having obtained the consent of her parents, who knew this much of Allan, that he had ‘come o’ decent folk,’ and for the rest felt satisfied that Flora might be trusted to make a prudent choice, there remained nothing for her but to announce the state of affairs to her mistresses—perhaps the most trying part of the matter, for it went near to break her heart to tell them that she was going to leave them.

Having at length fixed upon Miss Johanna as the most accessible and easily dealt with, not without considerable palpitation at her heart and a faltering voice, she told her what was about to take place. That kind lady expressed deep regret at the prospect of parting with her. But feeling, perhaps in consequence of an early and unfortunate attachment of her own, a tender sympathy in love affairs, she spoke soothingly to the agitated young woman. And after testifying the interest she felt in her prospects by the usual inquiries, though made with the greatest delicacy, she greatly relieved Flora's mind by promising to break the news to her sister, by whom it was received in a very different manner.

Though as a staunch conservative Miss Hamilton would have repudiated with scorn the epithet of 'strong-minded,' if applied to herself in the sense of a desire to support 'woman's right to the Franchise,' she was decided in upholding the independence of the sex in that of looking upon matrimony as a very doubtful advantage in cases where females are in a position to gain their own livelihood respectably.

'Of all people, Flora to think of marrying!' she exclaimed. 'I should have fancied her the

very last ! Indeed I wonder what ever can set a servant girl—at least one in such a place as this—on anything of the kind. If she expects to be half as comfortable as she's been with us, she'll find herself mistaken, I can tell her. She does not know what's before her, that's all !'

Much the same ground was gone over in her subsequent interview with poor Flora, who was of course again subjected to a series of questions, put in a very different spirit from those of Miss Johanna, regarding her prospects in the step she was about to take, and—still more trying ordeal—respecting her intended.

'What were his means of living? Had he laid by anything towards housekeeping?'

Flora 'didn't know.' She 'thought it wasn't her part to ask about the like o' that,' but 'she supposed he had, as he had always been in good and constant employment.'

'“Suppose” is not enough,' was the retort. 'No woman, unless she is a downright simpleton, would enter into such a connection without making sure of a decent provision for the future.' Adding, 'But then, of course, that is your own look-out.'

Then, 'Was he a man of good character, steady and sober?'

A more puzzling query still ; for, in truth, Flora could not answer confidently in the affirmative. She had indeed heard some hints of his being 'fond of company,' and though not exactly addicted to 'forget himself,' not always sufficiently on his guard against it. But as no woman, even the most correct in her own principles, is willing to give credence to such insinuations against the man she loves, Flora had looked upon these as most probably without foundation ; and never having seen any grounds for believing them, had determined to take Allan's good character on trust. So, not without some hesitation, however, she answered that 'as far as she knew, he was so.'

'A poor guarantee on which to risk your future happiness, Flora. You should never have agreed to marry him without the strictest inquiry on that point. But now, since you have made up your mind, there's no use in speaking. And since you didn't think it worth your while to ask my advice—and I flatter myself no one could have given you a more judicious one—you must just follow your own bent. And all that I have to say is that, though I wish you well—indeed, have always

done so—mind that if things should turn out ill, you've nothing to look for from me.'

The colour mounted to Flora's cheek, and for a moment she seemed struggling with feelings which left her at a loss what to answer.

At length, with an effort for self-possession, she said, with a mixture of simplicity and honest confidence that astonished the lady—'I'm certain, ma'am, that if I were in straits or trouble o' any kind, yourself would be the first to help me.' Adding, with a suppressed sob, 'Ye've aye been so kind to me, ye never would forsake me if things went against me.'

Miss Hamilton was touched. 'Well, Flora, we must just hope that you'll never require to put me to the test,' she said. 'Still, I must always think that one cannot be too particular in seeing that all is right—that's as far as it is possible to ascertain—before entering upon a step so all-important.' And so the subject was allowed to drop.

And when the time came for Flora to leave the house which had been such a happy home to her, she went forth loaded at once with many good wishes and various gifts,—several useful articles of clothing and some valuable books from Miss Johanna, and a good round

sum of money for household 'plenishing' from Miss Hamilton. And with much heartfelt sorrow, and many tears, did she part from these good kind mistresses, to enter on the unknown duties, responsibilities, and possible trials lying before her in the uncertain future.





CHAPTER III.

FLORA'S MARRIED LIFE.

FOR some time after her marriage all went on as smoothly with Flora as she could reasonably expect, since, being in most respects a person of more than common prudence and good sense, she had never allowed her anticipations of happiness in her new position to extend beyond due bounds. And well for her that it was so. Miss Hamilton had only been right in predicting that she would experience a very decided change in many ways ; indeed she knew well that it could not be otherwise. The very contrast between the dwelling she now occupied, in the close confined atmosphere of a crowded tenement in one of the most obscure streets of Glasgow, and the spacious comfortable abode

she had left, with its beautiful surroundings, pure air, and peaceful retirement, was sufficiently striking. Sadly, too, did she miss the beautiful scenery to which she had been so long accustomed, for, as we before remarked, Flora had a wonderful taste for the varied aspects of nature. Even that of her own native island, with its rock-bound coast, its stern headlands washed by the wild sea-waves, its bare desolate hills, and dreary moorlands, always possessed an indescribable charm for her. And still more attractive in her eyes had been the lovely village on the Firth of Clyde, with its pebbly beach and picturesque wooded points stretching out into the clear blue waters, which presented a scene of life and animation on account of the numerous vessels passing to and fro; its green slopes, and pretty villas, with their flower gardens and tasteful grounds. And often as she sat alone of evenings in her small close room, perhaps knitting or sewing, with nothing visible outside but tall dingy houses, scarce leaving her a glimpse of the summer sky above them, her thoughts would revert to Miss Hamilton's cheerful lofty kitchen, of which she had so long enjoyed undisturbed possession, or to the portico in front of the house, from which,

at the same hour, she had many a time watched the sun setting in golden glory behind the western mountains, or admired the reflection of rosy-tinted twilight clouds on the mirror-like surface of the sea. And then, the moral atmosphere in the surroundings of the two dwellings, how immeasurably different in all respects! Instead of the sweet tones of Miss Johanna's voice, sometimes reading aloud for her instruction and amusement as she sat at work, or her melodious rendering of the hymn of praise, while playing an accompaniment on the harmonium, at evening worship—the shrewd sententious lectures of Miss Hamilton on various matters of household economy—the invariable kind words and loving counsels of both,—she had now not to choose, but listen to loud harsh voices in the court below, often engaged in not too seemly converse, sometimes in coarse merriment, as often in wrangling and swearing!

But in compensation, had she not gained as much as she had lost? Had she not a house, however dull and dingy, that she could call her own, and better still, a companion, a protector—one to care for and try to render happy, as he had vowed to do by her? Was she not united

to him whom she preferred above all others? And surely those advantages were enough to make up for all drawbacks.

But did she find in her husband all that she had expected of him,—the devotion, the tender care for her comfort and happiness, that she had reason to look for? Very far from it. When too late, she discovered that Miss Hamilton was only right in saying that a woman should make very sure of the character of the man to whom she pledges her troth before the irrevocable vows which are to bind them together for life are taken. Not that there was anything positively vicious about Allan MacLean. On the contrary, he was reasonably good-natured, and, on the whole, disposed to study her comfort and happiness so long as his doing so did not interfere with his own pursuits and amusements.

During the first months of their married life he would sometimes sit with her of an evening, and read aloud while she worked, or accompany her on a walk, when the weather permitted, to the suburbs of the city. But then these suburbs were so far off, such long streets to be traversed before they could be reached,—walking was so very tiresome after the toils

of the day. The house too, for whole evenings, especially in the long winter, was so dull that he was frequently tempted to join parties of jovial companions at the mechanics' club-room, sometimes at the billiard-table—still worse, at the tavern! And though as yet he seemed to do no worse than keep late hours, as he always came home sober, it was plain that Flora had been rightly informed regarding his love for 'company;' and she often thought, that in the first year of their marriage surely he need not have left her so much alone.

Yet, with that merciful, God-given instinct which inclines a woman to trust and believe in the man she loves through evil as through good report, she bore up cheerfully, and still tried to hope that, in spite of unpromising appearances, all would go right by and by. Allan was only a little thoughtless, slightly inconsiderate, but he would soon come in of that. And so she would make everything tidy, bright and cheerful for him within the dwelling, and always receive him with a kindly welcome, even when her heart was sad enough through his neglect and indifference.

And in due course, a new interest came to her life in the birth of a little son. With what

joy Flora hailed this gift, which at once drew forth all the tender affections and motherly instincts of her warm loving heart! What happiness would this little one be sure to bring to her home and hearth!

By and by—for men don't at first take to young children—his father would get so interested in, and fond of him, that the club and tavern would soon cease to have any attractions for him. In the sanguine indulgence of those bright hopes, how tenderly she watched over and tended the little one! No sad thoughts, no weariness, no dulness for Flora now. Her morning's work over, she would dress and take him out, sometimes on her shopping expeditions, sometimes on a call to good Grace Fraser, still kind and friendly as in years past, but getting old, and living at a distance which precluded frequent visits between the cousins. Then of nights, when she had seen to all his father's comforts, she would bathe and hush her boy to sleep with one of her plaintive Gaelic songs, which she sang very sweetly,—again indulging in pleasant dreams of coming bliss to the household when he should be running about and noticing everything, intelligent enough to



'She would . . . hush her boy to sleep with one of her plaintive Gaelic songs.
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amuse and interest Allan, and keep him at his own fireside more constantly than now.

While clinging gratefully to these hopes, Flora was almost entirely happy. But alas! long ere they could be realized, a deep shadow darkened her home, in the sudden removal, by one of those ailments so common to infants, of him whose advent had awakened them! Then, proportionate to her joy at his birth, was Flora's sorrow at losing him,—a sorrow whose depth a mother only can estimate, described in the emphatic language of Scripture as the grief which will not be comforted, because the child 'is not.'

The unexpected death of her first-born was the most trying dispensation she had ever known. And like most of us to whom sorrow and disappointment are comparatively new, she at first found it impossible to acquiesce and say from the depths of her stricken heart, 'Thy will, O Lord, not mine, be done!'

Allan too seemed to feel the bereavement more than his wife could have believed possible, though this might partly be due to the inevitable gloom always accompanying the intrusion of the dread Destroyer into a household, even in the removal of an infant. Worst of all, his

sorrow only resulted in a further exhibition of selfishness ; as, instead of staying at home and doing what he could to cheer his wife, the gloom of that home furnished him with an excuse for seeking more congenial company out of doors. And a gentle remonstrance from her was met with a reply which went far to increase her desolation of heart.

‘How could she reasonably expect him to stay in at night and she continually moping as she did after the child?’ Adding, ‘I couldn’t have believed it o’ you, Flora, that seemed so good an’ pious, but that you would have shown more resignation to what God sends. But I begin to think that you religious folks are, after all, no better when put to the test, than the like o’ mysel’ that makes no pretence to anything o’ the kind.’

The reflection contained in this speech, while cutting Flora to the heart, still induced a salutary resolve. ‘I’ll take care,’ she thought, ‘never again to give him cause to distrust the power o’ religion on account o’ my sinful murmuring. I feel I’ve been very weak and sinful to give way to my grief as I’ve been doing, an’ I admit he’s too much reason to speak as he does. But with God’s help, I’ll try

to show him a better example after this ; and take comfort in the thought that my baby is with God.' And so henceforth she made an effort to assume a cheerfulness she could not feel,—to meet him with a smile of welcome when he came in from his work, and never again in his presence to allude to her bereavement. But for this restraint on her feelings she paid the inevitable price. Nature must have its way, and a mother's grief its vent. Many tears were still shed in the long solitary hours when her husband was absent, and she found but too much leisure to indulge her sorrow, and, indeed, had too little desire to check the bitter pang which will arise in the bereaved heart, and which to cherish, strange as it may seem to the uninitiated in such feelings, often brings a mournful relief.

One day a neighbour woman, who, as the mother of a large family, experienced in similar sorrows, had shown much kindly sympathy for Flora in hers, happened to surprise her in the indulgence of this secret grief.

'I've just been thinkin', Mrs. MacLean, dear,' she said, after uttering the oft-repeated words of sympathy with which she had as yet failed to soothe the poor Flora, 'o' something that

might be a diversion to yer mind an' help to cheer ye; for though I canna blame ye, as I well know what ye're feeling, I see ye're just wastin' away yer life, an' after a', only hurtin' yersel' in lamenting o'er the sweet bairn that God has seen fit to take away. What would ye think, now,' she continued, after some slight hesitation, 'o' takin' in another baby to nurse?'

Flora choked back her tears, and wiping her eyes, looked up at her kind neighbour in considerable surprise; the idea being so new, and somewhat startling to her, that for a moment she could scarcely take it in. Then the maternal instinct reviving in her heart at the good woman's suggestion, which she well knew was made in all kindness, she said, 'Well, I don't know but it might help me as much as anything could,—but nae bairn could ever be to me like my ain.'

'I know that, dear. And yet ye would wonder how a baby ye take to nurse gets to wind itself round yer heart,' rejoined Mrs. Stewart. 'But maybe I would scarcely hae ventured to say anything about it to ye, if it hadna been that I know o' a dear little bairn that I'm sure yer kind heart would be interested in. It's a bonny baby, too, and a decent

cleanly mother, that has everything as nice about it as you could have; indeed, I wouldn't else think o' yer takin' it. She's just so partic'lar to have it well cared for, that she's been waitin' on till she could hear o' some kind motherly body that would take it. But of course I never said a word to her about you till I should ask what ye thought o' my proposal.'

On inquiring particulars, Flora found that the woman in whom her good neighbour felt so kindly interested was a recently made widow, her husband having died of fever just about two months before the birth of this their first child. Having no means for its support—all the mutual savings of the pair having, as is too often the case, been expended on house furniture and marriage outfit—the mother had determined to go back to service, her former mistress whom she had left to be married, having agreed on her application to give her the situation she had before held in her establishment; and, as Mrs. Stewart stated, she was in search of a suitable person to whom to entrust her child. And so it had occurred to that good woman to speak of the thing to Flora.

Deeply touched with hearing of a case in

many respects sadder than her own, the warm-hearted, impulsive Flora was more inclined than at first to fall in with her neighbour's suggestion. Still, she felt considerable doubts as to how her husband might stand affected. 'I would be well pleased to take the poor thing,' she said, 'both on my own account, and because I'm sure it would be an ease to the mother's mind to see it in the hands o' one that would care for it. But then, I don't know what Allan might say. I doubt his pride might be hurt at the thought o' his wife taking in a bairn to nurse.' And feeling that he might start other objections as well, she found herself compelled to tell Mrs. Stewart that she really could not venture to name the thing to him.

'I'll no let that be a hindrance if I can help it,' was the reply. 'And since ye're willing to take the bairn, I'll speak to Allan myself rather than lose a good chance for the poor thing. He'll surely never be so unreasonable as to object to anything that might be for your good.'

Flora had nothing to say against that proposal; but, as it turned out, she was only right in anticipating objections on her husband's part.

‘I don’t see how my wife should be troubling herself wi’ other people’s brats,’ he said. ‘We’re surely no just come to that pass that she should need to do the like o’ that;’ the native pride rising.

After that, Mrs. Stewart had too much tact to allude to the good pay that the child’s mother had promised to give out of the handsome wages she would have in her old place. She rather dwelt on the benefit to Flora from the occupation and interest the charge would afford in the present state of her spirits; and above all, on the kind office to the widowed mother and fatherless child. But while disclaiming all pecuniary considerations, these after all turned the scale with Allan; though, kind-hearted in the main, he was really touched with some feelings of compassion for the objects of good Mrs. Stewart’s sympathy. The truth was, that the thought of making something by it was a part of the transaction which he could not afford to despise. Improvident, like too many of his class, he had laid by very little of his really good wages, and but for Flora’s savings, aided by Miss Hamilton’s gifts, the outlay attending their setting up house would have

landed him in serious embarrassments, all the more that he had insisted on presenting his bride with a far too expensive wedding-dress. In vain had Flora, to whose simple ideas such extravagance was very repulsive, remonstrated. 'It was the custom,' Allan said, 'for every bridegroom in his class of life nowadays to do so,' and that was enough.

But a reflection on this, and other matters, now coming in aid of Mrs. Stewart's persuasions and Flora's desire, he at last agreed to her proposal that the widow should call on the following day and negotiate matters with his wife. The latter found her all that Mrs. Stewart had led her to expect; at once attractive in appearance, and far above the common in manners, having enjoyed the advantage of long service in places of the highest respectability. She looked so interesting, too, in her deep mourning weeds, and spoke so touchingly of her poor little boy, and her reluctance to part with him, and at the same time so sensibly of doing what she could for his support, and alluded so feelingly to the recent respective losses of both, that the good, simple-minded Flora was quite taken with her. And before they parted, it was arranged that the

little boy should be given into Flora's charge early in the following week. The rate of payment she offered for his board fortunately met with Allan's approval, going far to reconcile him to a matter to which at first he had expressed such objections. And the kind-hearted Mrs. Stewart, as chief agent in bringing it about, felt truly thankful at having succeeded in making an arrangement, which she confidently hoped would result in benefit to all parties.





CHAPTER IV.

A HOME MADE HAPPY BY A KIND DEED.

HE was with very mingled feelings that Flora received little Sandie Munro, when his mother came to deliver him up to her charge; the thrill of pleasure with which she took the sweet baby in her arms, being naturally succeeded by a pang of sorrow at the recollection of her own recent bereavement. But sympathy with the poor mother's distress at parting with her child soon absorbing every other feeling in her kind heart, she promised to do all she could to supply her place to the little thing, and sent her away comforted with the thought that she had left him in the hands of one so good and loving. He was a comely fair child, not of course equal in Flora's eyes to her own lost

treasure, but still very lovable and engaging, and, as Mrs. Stewart had said, appeared to have been thoroughly well cared for, he looked so neat, clean, and healthy. Though a little shy at first, he soon took to his new protectress.

And Flora found the first reward of her benevolence in consenting to take charge of him, in the thought that she had thus helped to relieve the mother's natural anxiety on his account; and afterwards, one still greater in the comfort and pleasure this new interest brought into her own life. Then, though as yet there was no change for the better as regarded Allan's frequent absence and late hours, the occupation thus given her helped, along with her household duties, to divert her mind from such causes of regret, and to make the time hang less heavily upon her hands.

Soon, too, it was the means of procuring her a little pleasant variety—doubly welcome as bringing her once more into contact with her late dear mistresses; a sister of the child's father, who was married and settled in the village where Flora had spent so many happy years in their service, having asked her, along with her little charge, to spend a week or two with her. At first Flora hesitated to accept

the invitation, from a feeling of unwillingness to leave her husband alone. But kind Mrs. Stewart's promises to look after his comforts, along with the thought of benefit from the fresh sea air to herself and the child, soon overcame her objections, chiefly from the painful conviction that her absence was unlikely to make much difference, so far as concerned his habits.

So she went, and the visit proved a real enjoyment, and did her infinite good. It was such a pleasure to see her good kind mistresses again; Miss Johanna showing so much interest and sympathy, and even Miss Hamilton refraining from making any inquiries, which she might have felt difficulty in answering satisfactorily. It was even more gratifying, on her return home, to be told by her husband that he had missed her—though Mrs. Stewart had, faithful to her promise, attended to all his wants—and to hear him express satisfaction with the improvement on her looks and spirits, and pleasanter still to find, as a result of her absence, that he stayed in more frequently of nights than formerly.

Thus all began to go on more prosperously with Flora; and the dull house in the dingy court became gradually more bright and cheerful

than it had been since she had met with her great sorrow. Little Sandie continued to thrive wonderfully as he grew apace and became more engaging every day, and, as Mrs. Stewart had predicted, soon 'wound himself round' Flora's heart. Allan too, got to like the child, and even to be amused and interested with his winning ways, as he became more intelligent, and in due time began to run about and speak after his own childish fashion. And even when, at the end of two years, another little son was born to them, while naturally feeling the strongest affection for their own child, Sandie still held a warm place in the hearts of both parents. Nothing could exceed the boy's love for his 'little brother,' as he was taught to call him; and when Colin—a fair and lovely child, quite equal to Flora's ever-lamented first-born—became capable of the feeling, he as warmly returned that affection.

Thus, as 'they grew in beauty side by side, and filled that home with glee,' Flora once more felt as if her cup of happiness was nearly full, and that she had little more to wish for. The increased attractions of that home rendered Allan more inclined to be social and domestic; and to the occasional visits he still paid to his

club she would have considered it unreasonable to object.

But all human happiness is, as we know, subject to mutation; and so a change, as unexpected as it was vexatious, suddenly came to disturb that of Flora's home circle.

Sandie had completed his fifth year, and little Colin his third, when the mother of the former called one day to make an announcement which, on account of the consequences she soon found it involved, at once startled and dismayed the warm-hearted Flora. Hitherto the mother, on her periodical visits to her child, had always expressed the greatest satisfaction with his progress, along with deep gratitude for the kind motherly care of his protectress, and had continued regularly to pay such a sum for his board as had enabled the prudent, frugal Flora to brighten her humble abode by the addition of many little comforts. She had always, too, prided herself in keeping both children so clean and tidy, while trying to make them good and obedient, that they were everywhere remarked as very different in those respects from the other juveniles of the not over-choice locality in which the family still lived. And so entirely had little Sandie

become identified with their household, that she, as well as Allan, had come almost to regard him as their elder son. The idea of his being taken away from her was thus one that had never once occurred to Flora. What then was her dismay on hearing that it was his mother's intention to remove him? Scarce able to take in an announcement so painful to her feelings, she asked an explanation. And then, with some hesitation, Mrs. Munro told her that she was about to make a second marriage, and, in the prospect of taking up house again, must of course have her child to live with her.

The very last thing that had ever entered into Flora's calculations; and yet, after a moment's consideration, she felt she might in some measure have been prepared for something of the kind. Of late she had observed certain symptoms of levity about the woman, formerly so sedate and apparently so sensible, which to her simple unsophisticated mind suggested tendencies very unbecoming, as Flora could not help thinking, to one in her position. She had, for one thing, entirely laid aside her mourning for her first husband, and had begun to indulge in an expensive and showy style of dress, even carried so far as to

wear earrings and other ornaments—a breach of propriety which, to Flora's strict notions, appeared quite unpardonable. And though very reticent about the new connection which she was forming, Flora soon discovered that it was only in keeping with such indications of a change not to the better in the once apparently sober-minded widow. From a mutual acquaintance who knew the particulars, she heard that the man she was going to marry had come about the house where she was serving as suitor to one of the other domestics. A misunderstanding having arisen between the pair, Mrs. Munro, tired of service and longing again to enjoy the fancied freedom of 'a house of her own,' had taken the opportunity of making herself so agreeable to the disappointed lover, that, won by her attractions of look and manner, he had transferred his attentions to her, and ultimately asked her to become his wife. Having thus gained her object, without inquiry regarding his character, she accepted what seemed in a worldly point of view an advantageous settlement, the man being understood to have a good salary as traveller to a commercial house in the city.

Repugnant to Flora's strict ideas of the

fitness of things as second marriages were in general, the widow's dependent situation might have reconciled her to hers as an exception, if she had chosen a husband of suitable age and character. But from the same informant she learned that, as regarded the former, he was many years her junior; and still worse, was understood to be a man of no principle, and of reputed dissipated habits. A sad blow to poor Flora, to think of the little boy she so loved being thus brought into connection with such a character. But while filled with sad forebodings regarding poor little Sandie's prospects for the future under such auspices, as it was a case in which she had no right to interfere, there was nothing for her but to prepare to resign him to his mother's charge so soon as the marriage should be over.

We pass over the sorrowful parting that ensued, painful alike to parents and children. How far the boy could realize its sadness, his foster-mother knew not. But as his affection for her was naturally much stronger than it could be for his own parent, of whom he had known comparatively so little, the tears that he shed when taken from her, seemed to testify to the depth of a sorrow which even the

prospect of a change, often attractive to the childish mind, had no power to mitigate. And as Flora pressed him to her maternal bosom, and asked God to bless him, she felt it impossible to restrain her own ; while little Colin, though at first not able to take in the fact that 'his brother' had gone away to return no more, cried long and bitterly when made aware that it was so. Allan too, whose naturally warm affections had been awakened more than he could have believed possible for the fatherless boy, missed him so much as to feel also the desolate blank which pervaded the household after his departure.

Though the mother's invitation to Flora to 'come and see Sandie,' had not been so cordial as she might have expected, her deep interest in the child induced her occasionally to go.

On one of these occasions she was introduced to the man Foster, whom Sandie's mother had taken for her second husband, and found to her dismay that his whole demeanour seemed too plainly to confirm the accounts she had heard of him. His manners were surly and forbidding ; and his appearance, though in other respects not unfavourable, gave unmistakable indication of a tendency to be 'fast.' And

still sadder to her kind heart, was the marked change for the worse soon evident in poor Sandie. Every time she saw him she was struck with it. He seemed gradually to become thinner and paler, while the joyous, bright expression of his comely face had given place to a look of extreme sadness, so that even the sight of his 'dear mother,' as he was wont to call Flora, failed to bring a smile to it.

Then his 'cowed' look,—as she expressed it in her idiom, meaning something between intimidated and terrified,—especially when his stepfather was present, left on her mind the painful impression that Foster was in the habit of treating him unkindly. And this impression soon became a conviction, when she heard him frequently address harsh words to the poor child, who seemed terrified to speak or even to look up; and more than once her ear caught a suppressed sob from the corner where he invariably sat on a low stool, his face generally buried in his clasped hands.

'My heart's sore for poor wee Sandie,' she said to her husband, on her return from the last of those visits; 'he's no like the same bairn he was when he stayed wi' us. I've long suspected that his stepfather treats him cruelly,

and now I find it's too true, for I happened to meet his aunt from D—— to-night, and she told me all about how things stand. It seems that the mother had never told Foster before the marriage that she had a child; and when she took poor Sandie home, he had been so angry wi' her for keeping him ignorant about it, that he said he never would have had anything to do wi' her if he had known. He had taken her, he said, but didn't choose to be bothered wi' another man's brat. And so he revenges himself on the poor innocent bairn. The aunt says it grieves her so much to see the way he uses him, that she would fain offer to take him home wi' her, but being his father's sister she does not like to meddle wi' Foster; an' that seems in one way natural enough, though it's sad to think that poor Sandie should be the sufferer!' And Flora in vain tried to suppress her tears.

'He shan't be that, if I can prevent it!', exclaimed Allan, 'so don't cry, wife. Though his mother's been such a fool as to marry a cruel bad man like that, I'll no' let poor wee Sandie be ill used by him as long as I've a home to give him. Ye'll just go back at once, Flora, an' ask the mother to let him come an' live wi' us

again. We'll never miss the poor bairn's bite and his sup, an' he'll aye be well treated here !'

'God bless ye, Allan, for this !' exclaimed Flora, in the fulness of her gratified feelings, while tears of joy rose to her eyes ; 'I aye said ye had a kind heart. I'll only be too glad to do as ye wish ; but what if the mother should refuse to part wi' him ?'

'She'll surely do anything rather than see her bairn ill used ! At any rate, ye can but try to persuade her to let him come,' Allan replied.

But Flora found there was no persuasion needed, the mother's readiness to accept her kind offer again confirming the truth of what had appeared only too obvious.

'I'm sure it's very good o' ye, Mrs. MacLean,' she said ; 'an' the bairn'll be blithe to go back wi' ye. The truth is,' she added, with a hesitating attempt at apology, 'that Foster's never been accustomed wi' bairns, an' so he's never taken to Sandie. I suspect, besides, that he's a timid thing ; or else ye've been too kind to him, an' he's a bit petted. But there's just one thing,' and she again hesitated,—'mind I can't give ye any board this time wi' him, as I'm of course earning nothing now. Besides, it's no to be expected that a mother would consent to

part wi' her child if she could keep him, unless it was for his good, at least in the meantime.'

'Never speak about board,' said Flora, seeing plainly what was passing in the unfortunate mother's mind; 'we look upon Sandie as our own bairn.'

'Better that he should go wi' one that'll be kind to him, than stay here to be ill treated!' was the silent reflection of the poor woman, deeply feeling the painful position into which she had brought herself, now that it was too late. And so the thing was settled at once.

Once more the old bright joyous expression returned to poor Sandie's face, when he found he was to go back with the kind woman he had always looked upon as a mother. Flora could scarce believe him to be the same downcast crushed-looking little creature she had seen him so lately. He could not repress his evident impatience to be gone, as, not even stopping to say 'Good-bye,' he seized her hand and almost dragged her along with him, never once slackening his pace when they got outside, as if he feared pursuit, till they reached the old familiar court where he had lived so happily in the only home he had ever known.

'I'm in my own hoose noo!' he exclaimed,

as, after pushing open the door, through which a cheerful blaze of light was reflected out into the dark court, he ran joyfully up to the comfortable fireside where little Colin sat on his father's knee, and, throwing his arms round his neck, he almost devoured him with kisses.

'Yes, my boy,' said Allan kindly, as he patted his head, 'it's your own home; and please God, ye'll never leave it again.'

'Sandie no' to do away adain,' lisped little Colin, holding fast by the hand of his recovered brother.

'Oh, Allan, doesn't it make yer heart glad to think o' what ye've done for this poor bairn? I'm sure it does mine. And now that Sandie's come back to us, I may tell you that I think the blessing o' God'll come upon our household along wi' him,' said Flora.

'Well, I hope so, Flora,' he replied, smiling at his wife's enthusiasm, as he thought it; 'but mind, I didna show this bit kindness to the poor boy in the hope o' any reward. It was just as I said, because I couldn't bear to think o' his being cruelly treated.'

'Ay, but don't ye mind, Allan, what our Lord said, that "even a cup o' cold water given in His name would not lose its reward"? An' I'm sure

He'll no forget ye, for it's you that has all the credit of it—for this act o' kindness to poor Sandie. It's borne in upon my mind that He'll send us a blessing,—for do ye know what text turned up to me this morning before I knew anything o' what was to happen about him? It was in the fifth chapter o' Genesis, where Noah's father says o' him when he was born, an' after he gave him his name, "This same shall comfort us." It seemed such a pleasant thing to think o'! And now nothing'll persuade me but that it someway applies to the bairn we've adopted as our own.'

Again Allan smiled—'Ye've a wonderful way o' bringing some good out o' everything, wife,' he said. 'And at any rate, I'm sure none o' us'll ever repent what we've done in taking home the poor bairn.'

And not in all the great city of Glasgow was there that night a happier home than the humble one of Allan and Flora MacLean in that obscure dingy court. For do not kind deeds, springing from pure motives, bring greater happiness to those by whom they are done, than all the surroundings of wealth and luxury can produce in hearts to which such benevolent feelings are unknown?



CHAPTER V.

LIGHT AND SHADOW.

AND truly there seemed to be some grounds for Flora's anticipations ; as a blessing appeared to descend on the household ever after that memorable night. Everything prospered with its inmates. Allan's wages were raised ; and through the economy of his frugal wife, and his own increasingly steady habits, savings were laid by, and home comforts multiplied. And soon an event occurred that brought greater satisfaction to Flora than almost anything that had preceded it. Early in the spring of the second year after Sandie's return, an opportunity for the family to settle in her own dear native island was offered. The growing infirmities of age having unfitted her father for

his former active employment, his eldest son, the careful, steady Ian, was promoted to his post as overseer of the workmen at the slate quarry, the great industry of the place. And Ian's situation as foreman was, through interest of the family with the lessee of the work, offered to Allan MacLean. Though as regarded emolument he would be no gainer, other considerations—the chief of which was Flora's desire to return to her native place—induced him to accept the offer. For, long ere now he had learned to value his good wife as she deserved, and her wishes, always reasonable, had become to him a leading motive in most things.

As we know, Flora had never taken to Glasgow as a place of residence ; her heart, ever continuing to yearn for the pure fresh breezes, the freedom and quiet retirement of the wild sea-washed island, always associated with her recollections of calm contentment and happiness in her early home. And then, to be near her parents, to tend and comfort them in their declining years, was inducement sufficient, had there been no other, to prompt her desire to go. For Morag—never so steady or dutiful as she had been—had married and left them, to

emigrate to Australia with her husband, and there was no female at home to help the mother in her household cares ; and Ian, who had thoughts of marrying too, could not bring himself to forsake them in their old age while matters stood thus. So it was at once settled that they should go ; the rather that Allan too was getting tired of the close city lane, and had lost his relish for club-meetings and other evening entertainments. And though his parents were gone, and he had no relatives of his own there now, still his native place had the attractions of early associations for him also. 'It would be so much pleasanter,' as Flora said, 'to be where they might have a bit cottage to themselves, and keep a cow ; an' where the bairns could run about an' play, an' be so healthy by what they could be in Glasgow ; an' better still, get out o' the way o' companions that might lead them astray—too like to be met wi' in a big city.'

Their simple preparations being soon completed, their house given up, and furniture packed to be taken along with them in the steamer, Flora went to bid farewell to her former kind mistresses, partly, perhaps, to let them see her little Colin, of whom she was

naturally somewhat proud, now a lovely boy of five, and so clever and forward for his years. It was very gratifying to the mother to find him admired even beyond her expectations, and still more so to receive tokens of goodwill and many kind wishes from the worthy and respected ladies. Equally kind farewells were exchanged with her good neighbour Mrs. Stewart, and with her cousins old Grace Fraser and her brother; but Sandie's mother, who had now another child to care for, parted from the poor boy with an indifference which again made Flora rejoice that he was provided with a better home than he could have had with her now.

We need not attempt to describe the happy family reunion that followed, when the couple with their little ones reached the Hebrides after an unusually smooth and pleasant passage. Flora's cup of happiness seemed full when she once more set foot on her native soil, and found herself again under the roof of her beloved parents. And though sensibly struck with the changes which the long lapse of years had produced on them, as she had not seen them since her marriage, the sad conviction that their best days were over was soon forgotten



KYLES OF BUTE

in her joy at being with them, and the gratified pleasure she felt in presenting to them her own and her adopted child. It was delightful, too, to find herself welcomed back with almost equal warmth by those still remaining of the inhabitants of the island who had known and loved her before she left it.

A nice little cottage standing near the shore, and within a few yards of her father's dwelling, was soon secured for the new-comers, which by dint of whitewashing, scrubbing, and arranging the furniture to the best advantage, was presently made neat and comfortable; the neighbours all lending willing aid, for Flora had lost none of her popularity through absence. Some of them, too, brought myrtles, fuchsias, and geraniums for her window; the cultivation of flowers, under the encouragement and direction of the proprietor's family, who spent some months of every summer in the island, having now become, along with an increasing tendency towards cleanliness and order, an institution in the workmen's cottages. A cow was purchased, for which free pasture was found on the common stretching along the rocky beach; the little patch of garden behind was dug up and planted with vegetables, and

even a flower-border was laid out under the cottage windows, supplying Allan with healthful employment to keep it in order, when not out fishing in a boat which he hired along with a fellow-workman. Then the children were sent to school; and after her own household work was over, Flora devoted some hours daily to helping her mother with hers. It seemed to her like a dream, but a very delightful one, to be once more discharging these duties in the old familiar home, though now, along with others arising from new ties, that brought also new happiness. Often was her heart lifted up in thanksgiving to the Giver of all good on account of the many blessings of her lot—blessings quite beyond her anticipations, and, as she acknowledged in her unaffected humility, as far beyond her deserts.

Soon, too, her one source of maternal pride in her only child was amply gratified by the universal love and admiration he met with among the kind-hearted, simple-minded islanders. So singularly lovely and attractive was little Colin, with his delicate refined features, large blue eyes, and expression of engaging sweetness, combined with rare intelligence in one so young, that it was no wonder

he should at once become the pride and boast of the island. If the child could have been spoilt, he certainly ran a fair chance of it ; but there was a gentle, unselfish amiability about him which effectually prevented such a consummation. From the first dawn of reason, both children had had the advantage of pious instruction from the good mother, who told them in her own simple way such truths as she thought they could understand regarding God, their kind and bounteous Father in heaven, who had watched over and cared for them, and given them all the blessings they enjoyed, and of the love of the Saviour especially shown to children ; endeavouring to teach them to love God and all God's creatures in return. And those lessons had been especially blessed to Colin in helping to produce a spirit of gentle obedience to his parents, and love to all around him, because he had been taught to feel that such was pleasing in God's sight. His early love for his foster-brother continued strong as ever, and was as warmly returned by Sandie, who, in proud consciousness of superior age and strength, would have claimed a right to protect him if any one had dared to hurt Colin. But, we need scarcely add, such protection was

uncalled for; not one throughout the length and breadth of the island would have injured a hair of the little boy's head. Though full of childish sport and glee, there was withal a certain sedate gravity about Colin which, along with his ability and quickness in learning his lessons at school, procured for him the pet name of 'the wee minister.' And pleased with the idea thus suggested, Flora sometimes indulged anticipations of a result in keeping with it, that perhaps in after years her son might really assume a position so honourable, so revered among the better class of the Scottish peasantry.

'Are there any such children as Colin?' is a question that some readers may be disposed to ask. We may answer in the beautiful words of a modern writer, 'Yes; but their names are on gravestones. Too pure and innocent to breathe the polluted atmosphere of this lower world, they are invariably translated in early youth to the Better World above, leaving behind them sad tender memories and "aching voids" in parents' hearts—the first never to be effaced, the latter never filled up.'

And so it proved in the case of little Colin. The bright promise of his early years was not

to be fulfilled on earth. Like an exotic too tender and lovely to resist the chilling blasts of an ungenial clime, he was soon taken to bloom in the Paradise of God.

An epidemic, mysterious in its source—for who could anticipate such a visitation in that remote region, with its pure sea-breezes, and cut off as it almost entirely was from contact with the outer world?—suddenly broke out in the island. It attacked several children of the village, some cases being mild, others severe, but as yet none proving fatal; till at last little Colin was seized with the malady. The first day that he sickened there was no medical aid at hand, the doctor, whose practice extended over more than one island and continent—there was so little need generally for his services—being absent on a distant expedition. Who can tell the deep anxieties of the mother during the hours that passed, till he should be able to obey the summons at once sent to bring him to see that precious child? When he came at last, immediately reading somewhat of alarm in his looks, she questioned him with trembling, eager apprehension. The good brave doctor, though never fearing to cross stormy firths and dangerous ferries in the discharge of his benevo-

lent duties, yet shrank from encouraging hopes that he saw were not likely to be fulfilled. So, evading those anxious inquiries, he prescribed the usual course of treatment, and promised to return on the morrow. Alas! by that time the fatal change too surely anticipated had come. The disease, which was scarlet fever, having suddenly gone in upon the brain, producing a stupor certain to prove the precursor of death, all human skill was unavailing to save that valued life.

The doctor's expression of face at once proclaimed the fatal truth; there was no need to question him now.

'My child is dying! I ken he is, doctor,' exclaimed the poor mother in a tone of deep anguish. And the doctor's earnest, sympathizing words—'God support and comfort you, Mrs. MacLean,' with the look of tender pity that accompanied them, went like a knell to Flora's heart, as extinguishing at once and for ever the last faint ray of hope to which, in spite of herself, she had till then tried to cling.

At first she seemed under the influence of a dream, unable, as we always are in the first agony of such a calamity, to realize its full extent. Could it really be that she was thus

to be deprived of her little Colin—the light, and joy, and sunshine of her existence? Had the dread sentence of death actually been recorded against that lovely blooming child, who but three days before was running about in all the vigour of health and buoyant youthful spirits? Were these bright blue eyes, so full of intelligence, which had so often met her own with looks of innocent confiding affection, never again to return her glance—so soon to close for ever on this world?

There are few mothers who in such a moment of overwhelming sorrow can bow with meek submission to the Divine will, and bring themselves to say with ‘the Shunammite’ of old, ‘It is well.’ Flora at least, patient, good as she had generally proved herself to be on most occasions, was not among the number. If she did not actually rebel, her feelings approached to something of the kind as she sat gazing hopelessly on the face of her unconscious child, and thought of him whom she would gladly have shielded from danger at the risk of her own life, as even now within the grasp of that dread power which no mortal may resist, and from whose awful visitations the stoutest heart shrinks back appalled. Her husband stood by

her side, awe-struck and silent, yet apparently in an agony of grief equalling her own. While her mother, who had come to share her watch on the first apprehension of danger, looked calmly on, deeply sharing the sorrow of both it is true, yet in a softened degree, long experience of the inevitable trials of life having mitigated the keenness of her feelings.

‘Flora, *machree*,’ she said, laying her hand gently on her daughter’s shoulder, ‘ye must try to submit wi’ patience to His will. Ye ken it’s only what’s before us all, sooner or later. An’ comfort yoursel’ wi’ the thought that the bonny bairn that’s so dear to us all will soon get away frae this world o’ sin an’ sorrow, to be for ever wi’ the Lord.’

And the aged father, who had just been summoned when all hope of the child’s recovery was over, uncovering his grey locks, and bending his head over his clasped hands, re-echoed in words similar to those of the doctor something between a blessing and a prayer on behalf of the afflicted parents.

Thus the weary hours dragged slowly on, till as the setting sun, which had for some time been shedding its parting beams into the chamber of death, sunk to rest, leaving purple

shadows on the mountains, a deeper shadow fell on the face of the dying child. The little bosom ceased to heave; the laboured breath grew still; the eyelids dropped over glazing eyes; and the spirit was with God. For some moments solemn stillness reigned. Then the grandmother, taking her daughter's hand in hers, and intimating more by sign than by words that she would perform the last sad duties to the departed, led her gently and unresistingly into the other apartment. Allan immediately followed his wife, and sat down by her side; but neither seemed capable of uttering a word to the other.

At last a thought occurred to the stricken woman, which produced the merciful effect of momentarily diverting her mind from her overwhelming sorrow. 'Where was Sandie?' No one had seen him since the morning; and in their engrossment with the mournful events of the day, he had been forgotten by all. But now, thankful for anything that could turn her thoughts from the calamity that weighed on them so heavily, she rose, saying she must see after him; and her husband feeling that any exertion was better for her than to be left to the indulgence of her grief, made no attempt to hinder her from going.

With faltering, yet hasty step, she took her way to the little garden behind, faintly calling the boy by name, but there was no answer returned. At length, as she came near a reef of rocks which formed a boundary next the shore, from among a thicket of heather and rushes she was sensible of a slight rustling noise, accompanied by a sound of stifled sobs, and, looking closer, she saw the object of her search lying prostrate, his face buried in his clasped hands, and weeping bitterly. She bent over him, and spoke soothingly. The boy looked up at the sound of her voice.

'Oh, mother, is it you?' he asked in a tone of strong emotion. Then, after a moment's pause, he added, with tremulous hesitating awe, 'Is wee Colin dead? I heard the doctor say to granny when she came wi' him to the door, that he wouldna live; an' I couldna go in, because I couldna bide to see him die!'

The bereaved mother gave his question the sad affirmative answer; and again the poor boy's frame shook with convulsive sobs.

At length, making a strong effort to subdue his sorrow, he raised himself from the ground, and going up to Flora, he gently placed his hand in hers.

‘Mother,’ he said, ‘I ken I’ll never be like Colin. But since God has ta’en him away, an’ ye’ve none but me now, I’ll try to be a good boy, an’ a comfort to father an’ you.’

These simple, artless words effected what all the sympathy already addressed to the grief-stricken mother had failed to produce.

Her heart at once melted, and the floodgates of her sorrow were opened, bringing relief and consolation. Sitting down upon a rock, she drew the boy towards her. ‘This same shall comfort us,’ she said fervently. And the first tears she had yet been able to shed fell fast and thick on the child’s head, as, bending over him, she pressed him tenderly to her bosom.





CHAPTER VI.

‘ THIS SAME SHALL COMFORT US.’

S EVEN years have passed away since the sad bereavement recorded in our last chapter had darkened the home of Flora MacLean ; and peace and contentment, if not happiness, have long since returned to brighten again that humble dwelling.

Mercifully ordered it is that time ever brings such healing to sorrowing hearts, and that the sore pangs awakened by the removal of our loved ones never retain their first poignancy, as life otherwise would be a burden too heavy to bear.

Since the day that the mortal remains of the ‘wee minister’ had been carried to the solitary old moorland churchyard, followed by numerous sincere mourners from the village, where

during his brief sojourn among them the child had been as universally loved as he was known, and wild-roses and heather had been scattered by loving hands over the grassy mound that covered his place of rest, a feeling of quiet resignation had gradually superseded the first overwhelming grief of his parents at their loss—as regarded Flora's especially. Sudden and sad as was the stroke that for the time being seemed to lay all her hopes in the dust, she soon came to recognise the hand which had smitten and which could also heal; and, though unable to trace the cause of God's dealings towards her, to acknowledge that He whom she had long known as her Father in heaven doeth all things wisely and well. And often as she sat at her window of a summer evening, and watched the sun sinking to rest among golden clouds, leaving dark shadows on the mountains, and a silver sheen on the tranquil bosom of the sea—as she thought of that other 'sun which had gone down long ere it was noon,' shedding more than twilight gloom on bereaved hearts,—comfort came with the certainty that it had long since risen to set no more, in the bright meridian of God's presence, when her little

Colin had been taken to be 'for ever with the Lord!'

And feeling that her child was thus now from all 'earth's sin and sorrow set free,' could she find it in her heart to wish him back again, especially when she knew that but a little while and she would be with him, to part no more for ever?

Allan's sorrow, though quieter and less demonstrative than hers, had been of longer duration. It might be because comfort from the same source whence hers was derived did not so soon dawn upon him. So deep indeed was his depression, seeming, as it did, to render him totally indifferent to all that was passing around him, that at times his wife felt apprehensive lest he should again seek the same solace to which he had formerly resorted. If he had still been in Glasgow among his old associates, it seemed probable that he might have yielded to that temptation. But that danger was mercifully averted, in answer, as she doubted not, to her earnest prayers on his behalf. His late habits of strict sobriety seemed too steady to be shaken; and gradually somewhat of his former energy and interest in his usual pursuits returned.

And Sandie,—how truly was the promise which Flora had from the first taken home to her heart, as confidently as if it had actually been addressed to herself, fulfilled in him! Never was son more gentle, loving, and obedient, than this child of their adoption to those bereaved parents. Never did an act of compassionate kindness more fully meet its reward in this world. With little, if any of their lost Colin's quickness and intelligence, with less of his engaging sweetness of look and demeanour, a lad of kinder heart or more sterling principle never lived.

'If Sandie's but slow in his ways, he's a boy that's as steady as heart could desire, an' a boy that'll always be painstaking an' dutiful,' was the half-prophetic verdict of some of the old village sires, expressed in the alliterative idiom of their native tongue; and time showed that it was a just one.

The boy's own artless resolution, uttered in the midst of his overwhelming sorrow at the death of his little 'brother,' seemed never once to be lost sight of in after years. There was very seldom anything in his conduct to call forth reproof from his foster-parents; and if ever required, it was received with becoming

humility and quiet submission. Never did he attempt to dispute their commands in the most trifling instance, and his chief happiness seemed to consist in the study of their slightest wish. He even denied himself the companionships and sports natural to his age, in order to devote himself to them. And though from his different tendency of mind he could not brighten their home as Colin would have done, he never caused them one anxious or uneasy thought. Strong, healthy, and active, he seemed to bid fair for long life and usefulness; and should God be pleased to spare him, they might now, more than ever, regard him as their own son,—his mother having emigrated to Australia along with her worthless husband, whose reckless conduct had procured his dismissal from his situation; and, with three others to provide for now, she had never once attempted to recall her eldest son.

Thus years rolled on. Flora's dark locks were becoming streaked with silver lines; and Allan's strong frame was less erect than it had been in days gone by.

The father had been taken away in a good old age, and the mother had come to be an inmate of her daughter's house, Ian having

long since married and made a new home for himself.

Things were going on with the family in the old quiet routine, when one evening, Allan, who still occasionally enjoyed the sport of fishing, went out to sea for that purpose with his old companion, Hector Macpherson, with whom he continued to share a boat. The autumn day had been bright and calm, but about sunset a sudden change set in. The sun went down amidst a mass of lurid clouds, which, boding coming tempest, occupied the edge of the horizon. Then, as its disk disappeared from view, the ocean became darkened by the reflection of heavy leaden clouds, while its billows were crested with white foam. A low, hollow moaning wind gradually rose into a heavy squall; and the screams of a flight of sea-birds mingled with the dash and roar of the waves, as they beat against the rocky coast.

Flora, often as her husband had been at sea in rough weather, never remembered him out in a storm like what the present threatened to be; and her anxiety on his account grew so uncontrollable that she found it impossible to rest for a moment. Every now and then she would run to the door, and, passing through the little

garden down to the shore, she would strain her eyes, half-blinded as they soon became with the drift and spray, over the vexed billows, vainly trying to discover any appearance of the endangered boat.

'Oh, Sandie,' she kept exclaiming, 'what'll become o' yer father in this fearful storm?' for the lad, feeling deeply for her anxiety, the more so that he could not help sharing her apprehensions, always would follow her, though finding it difficult to say anything by which he could hope to calm those fears.

'We must try to hope the best, mother. The wind's blowing from the leeward; it may not be so bad out in the offing as it seems to us. An' ye know, both father an' Macpherson are experienced boatmen, an' can manage a boat wi' any man o' the island,' he would say; but the distracted wife could take no comfort from those faint assurances.

'No boat can weather this storm, even wi' the best boatman that ever lived! I'm fear't there's nothing else to be thocht, but that they must be lost. O God, help them! an' God help me! He's been pleased to try me very sorely more than once. But oh, this would be worst o' all!' was poor Flora's responsive exclamation.

‘Try to trust Him yet, Flora, *machree*. Mind His arm’s no shortened that it canna save. He’s sent ye comfort in as sore straits before, an’ if it’s His will, He can deliver again.’ And the aged mother, who with great difficulty had tottered after her distracted daughter, and now stole thus unexpectedly upon her, laid her hand gently on her shoulder as she spoke those soothing words, making at the same time a vain effort to persuade her to return to the house.

‘I’ll run over an’ borrow the schoolmaster’s spyglass, mother,’ said Sandie, glad to fall upon any expedient that might possibly divert her mind from all-engrossing fears. ‘I’ll maybe see through it if the boat’s in sight ;—unless they’ve ta’en shelter at one o’ the nearer islands,’ he added, hazarding a conjecture which he felt to be all but untenable. And the poor woman, thankful to grasp at any suggestion which seemed to offer hope, made no attempt to utter a word in contradiction.

By this time a number of the villagers had begun to gather on the shore ; and anxious, fearful looks were exchanged between men who knew by experience the extent of the danger to which their unfortunate comrades were exposed in a storm so dreadful. But though too well

aware from their gestures that they shared her alarm, Flora caught no syllable of their whispered words, while she continued to stand insensible to the fury of the wind and the drenching spray as regarded herself and even her aged mother, so completely was her mind absorbed in the one subject of terrible apprehension.

At length Sandie, who had returned with the spyglass, which with the utmost difficulty he had succeeded in steadying so as to see through it, though very indistinctly, exclaimed that 'a boat was in sight,' adding immediately, 'It's it; I'm sure it is! An' they've hoisted sail!'

A simultaneous shout rang out from the assembled group on the shore, soon succeeded by a universal shudder as thoughts of the perilous position of that frail bark buffeted by the raging billows, arose in every heart.

And she who was chiefly concerned, turned her anxious tearful glance in the direction to which the lad pointed, with such feelings as may be imagined.

At first, in the gathering twilight, darkened by mist and spray, nothing was visible to the naked eye of the anxious onlookers; but one or two of the younger among them, on making

trial of the glass, confirmed Sandie's report, and soon afterwards every one could see the approach of the boat, as a lurid glare suddenly lit up the sky. A few minutes of breathless suspense to all as it came nearer; and a sight almost too painful for the stoutest heart there to look upon it, as every tremendous wave that dashed over it seemed to threaten its immediate destruction. The most experienced boatmen, in low, terror-stricken tones, expressed to each other their conviction that their unfortunate friends would never reach the shore alive.

But the buoyant youthful spirits among them, unwilling to give up hope, had meanwhile provided themselves with ropes, grappling irons, and anything else they could think of, in order to make a desperate effort for their rescue; and Sandie was the foremost of the brave band who determined to save their lives at the imminent risk of their own.

At length, sounds of mingled horror and dismay from the spectators announced the anticipated crisis. The boat was among the breakers! And none, not even the most hopeful of the younger among them, could conceal from themselves the fearful dread—approaching to certainty—that its occupants

must be dashed to pieces against the rocks! All rushed forward to the very verge of the cliffs, to watch the result with breathless awe-struck anxiety—all but a few shivering, trembling women, who remained to support poor Flora, though unable to suggest any consolation in circumstances so desperate. But none of them attempted to utter a word; while she seemed to have lost all power to move from the spot, where she stood with her hands clasped over her eyes, as if to shut out a sight too terrible to look upon.

What wonder that her brain should reel, that her senses should seem about to forsake her, as she listened to the tumult of men's voices, mingling with the dash of the breakers and the roar of the tempest—no sound bringing one shadow of hope to her!

At last a shout broke upon her ear, so loud, so joyous, that it was heard above all other sounds! Could it be possible—or was she under the influence of a dream?—‘Saved! They are saved!’ The revulsion of feeling produced was too overpowering, and she fell back insensible into the arms of the sympathising women who flocked around her.

When she awoke from her protracted swoon,

she found herself in her own cottage, supported in the arms of Sandie; her aged mother standing by her holding her hand.

‘Have I been dreaming?’ she asked, looking round her with a wild bewildered glance, ‘or did somebody tell me that my Allan is drowned?’

‘No, *machree*, thank God for it, he’s all safe. An’ it’s Sandie, under God Almighty, that ye owe it to that he’s alive an’ like to live,’ was her mother’s encouraging reply.

And it was as she said. While the strongest and most resolute men present, even the good kind Ian, his own brother-in-law, had shrunk back in terror from the attempt, it was Sandie’s foot that descended the slippery rocks, and Sandie’s arm that flung the rope, at the imminent risk of destruction to himself—which, as if by a miracle, the drowning Allan had succeeded in catching, till others, stimulated by the example of the brave lad, had come forward to assist in his rescue and that of his companion, who was also with the utmost difficulty drawn on shore.

‘Oh, thank God! An’ will he live?’ exclaimed Flora, scarce able to grasp the joyful assurance of her husband’s safety.

'Ay, please God, that will he, we hope wi' His blessing,' said the old mother reverently. 'After such a wonderful deliverance as He's sent him, it's no to be thocht He'll leave His work unfinished.'

'But oh, he must have been nigh killed in that awful struggle wi' the waves!' exclaimed Flora. 'I couldna have believed any mortal would stand it.'

'It's true, poor father's sore bruised among the rocks,' said Sandie; 'but since he's escaped wi' his life, we must hope he'll do well yet.' Adding soothingly, 'Of course the doctor's no' to be got the night, but the skilly folk like auld Mrs. Macpherson, Hector's mother, say they've seen as bad cases as ony o' them get over it.' And so it proved. When the doctor saw the injured man on the following day, after the 'skilly folk,' including some old women of the hamlet experienced in the use of herbs and simples, had successfully applied lotions and poultices for his relief, he confirmed their opinion that the patient would with careful nursing yet do well.

Though 'sore bruised,' as Sandy expressed it, no vital part was injured; and after a long experience of pain and helplessness, Allan

regained the use of his limbs, though never his former strength and vigour. His companion's life was also spared. And when able to go about again, it was Sandie's strong arm that supported Allan, as with unwearied care and watchfulness he had assisted Flora in tending him on his bed of pain. And often with hearts filled with gratitude did the pair thank God for the blessing He had sent them in 'that boy!'

And still greater blessings followed. If Allan never quite recovered his former strength of body, his 'soul prospered and was in health.' Ever after that memorable night of peril and deliverance he became a thoroughly changed man. Never forgetting God's mercy towards him in that wonderful preservation, he has given his heart to Him; and he is now as true a Christian, and humble as his wife has always been.

Of late years too, that home is once more brightened by the presence, and gladdened by the voices, of children, united to the pair not only by ties of affection, but of blood. For Sandie has married a daughter of Ian, a good true-hearted girl, as might be expected from the stock whence she came; and their children

are almost as dear to Flora and Allan as if their father had really been, as they always considered him, 'their own son.'

Their declining years are thus happy and peaceful. For, with the consciousness of rectitude, they possess the favour of God and man, along with the delightful reflection that their kind act to the helpless and destitute has proved its own reward. Having 'cast their bread upon the waters,' they have indeed 'found it after many days.'



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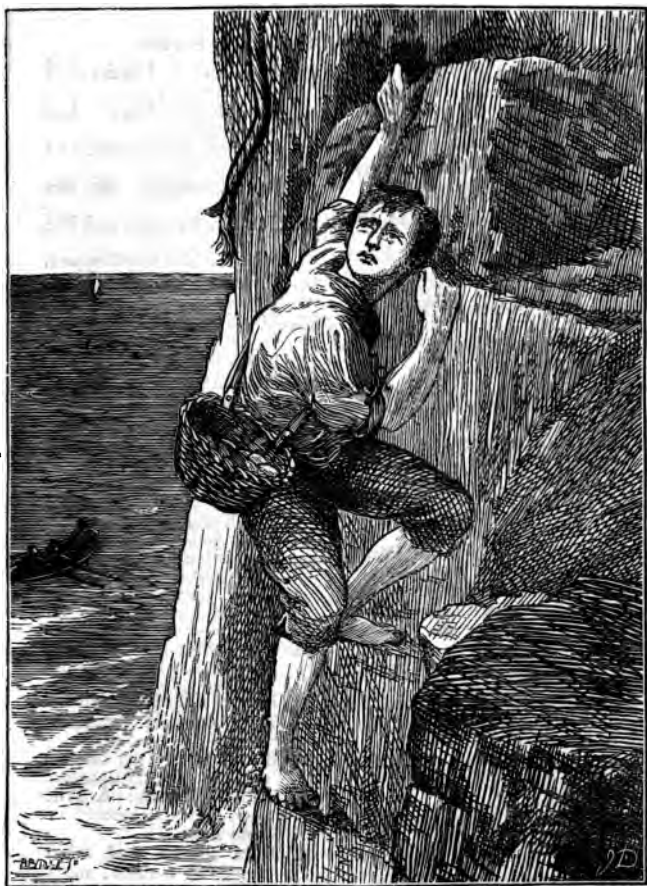
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